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“Project Querença” and creative tourism: visibility and local development of a village in the rural Algarve

This paper is result of research whose goal is to present the activities and tourist actions carried out by *Project Querença* regarding creative tourism. Based on literature and document reviews complemented by informal interviews to verify information, the paper provides a detailed account of the project. Data analysis was performed according to Geertz’s interpretive approach (comparison of the theoretical concepts and observations). The results show that the “Project Querença” through activities linked to tourism and creative partnerships with proposals for the enhancement of local culture and knowledge has raised the 'profile' and yielded opportunities for Querença and other villages of the interior of the Algarve.

Key words: Creative Tourism; Experience; Events; “Project Querença”

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Introduction

Tourism is often seen as a productive sector that contributes to economic sustainability and discourages young people from leaving their communities. However, Silva and Mendes (2012) show that the irregular demand hinders those benefits due to the high prices of inputs, allied to low-priced products and the cultural devaluation of villages, associated with low levels of income and lack of access to basic education.

Notwithstanding, some small rural communities have realized that tourism can be developed through actions aimed at minimizing negative impacts, seeking an ethical and sustainable approach that respects basic human and cultural rights of local populations. In this perspective, there is an increasing number of community-based tourism proposals based on activities of endogenous character which values and revives traditions and local beliefs. These experiences with tourism as a part of a productive arrangement make use of mechanisms opposed to those of mass tourism. According to Guzzatti (2010) they lead to the empowerment of communities, since their actions become a guarantee of protection and preservation, thus, strengthening communities and their territories.

Given this perspective, tourism can be understood as an activity that promotes local economic development. The model proposed by Yasuo and Shinichi (2013), however, points out that the economic effects are endogenously determined and that there is a complementarity between them. So to succeed in the development of tourism in rural areas, not only the aspects of the production process should be observed but management of local resources should also be stimulated, creating the basis for strengthening the heritage and partnerships between various sectors. Lustosa and Almeida (2011) show that joint efforts arise in the formation of tourism networks that link destinations and, from exclusive offers and experiences in small communities, create tourist routes to encourage specific demand. In Portugal, as well as in Brazil, these experiences have been growing and some are put forward aiming at the local development and the reduction of depopulation in villages and towns. Fons et al. (2011) and Park et al. (2012) point out that these proposals are strengthened, as they adopt the agricultural potential of these areas, the preservation and recognition of the wealth of natural, cultural, historic and scenic, as a factor of competitive and development for the communities.

In 2010, in the village of Querença (Loulé, Algarve), a team of researchers from the University of the Algarve, together with members of Loulé was formed in order to put into practice some actions to promote and enhance the economy on behalf of the population of Querença. The proposal called “Project Querença” aims to “recover and requalify a village with the coming of young graduates to it in order to produce ideas, offer solutions to local problems, encourage partnerships through networks that can help in the process of local and human development” (Silva & Silva, 2014, p. 1). To achieve this goal, among the several productive arrangements developed, there are some that fall in the shares and product offerings and services related to creative tourism. To the organizers of the “Project” it seemed a viable economic alternative given the increasing number of tourists interested in the cultural features and searching for proactive experiences in the places visited. In this sense, creative tourism comes as a disruption of the traditional model of guided tours to cultural or natural heritage and, in Querença, the team’s proposal is to offer activities that enable personal experiences and self-learning. In this context, the experience is not only learning, but also a transformation of the self, through an active participation of the tourist in a cultural action (crafts, gastronomy, hiking and contemplation of nature, traditional food, crops). This paper provides a descriptive account of the activities and actions developed by the “Project Querença” and the partners that make up your network.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for the collection and analysis of the material presented is of a qualitative (Denzin, & Lincoln, 1994), exploratory nature, through the collection of bibliographic data (articles, dissertations, theses and books) and documents (printed material, electronic reports, informational materials and advertising brochures) used for dissemination of cultural events and activities of ‘creative tourism’ developed with members and partners of the “Project Querença”.

This bibliographic and documentary collection format has been used with great frequency in exploratory or descriptive studies. This type of study provides a broad range of information and allows the use of data scattered in various publications, helping to build and define the conceptual framework surrounding the proposed subject of study (Gil, 1994).

Literature and documents date used by the authors are from 1990 to the present and belong to Brazilians, Portuguese and/or researchers from other countries who work with this topic. These texts were located in Brazilian and International Databases (CAPES, IBICT, SCIELO, EBSCO, LATINDEX). The compilation of the material was made considering the steps suggested by Salvador (1986) with theme, language (Portuguese, English and Spanish), sources (database) and chronological order (time survey period). Techniques for selection of material comprised the recognition of readings, in an exploratory and selective manner (Sasso de Lima & Miotto, 2007).

After the selection of literature and documents begins the process of interpretation of this research conducted according to the interpretative approach by Geertz (2008) which entails: reflective reading/critical, dense description and interpretation of authors' writings (raw data), identification of descriptors or keywords that respond directly to what is being analyzed and, finally, the contextual analysis of recurring patterns of responses showing the themes that emerge from the documents/literature and if these are linked or not to the theoretical framework of the proposal. Without the formal character of interviews, some conversations held with the team of "Project Querença" and village residents served to verify some observations done in the visits to Querença and actions described by the consulted authors.

Creative tourism experience

At the same time that culture can be a differentiating factor for a destination and a tourist attraction, if cultural actions are developed following the prevailing models of traditional tourism it can lead to the formation of homogeneous attractions, with similar destinations and without differentiation. This happens, according to Richards (2010; 2009; 2007), because the destinations use the same strategies and end up offering standardized products and services. This homogenization of cultural tourism products causes an opposite effect of what is proposed; rather than attracting, it has increasingly repelled the target audience. This process was described by the author as a McCulturalization alluding to what Ritzer (1993) called the McDonaldization of society, namely, the supply of ready-to-consume cultural products, fast-food style. The situation is aggravated by the fact that consumers are increasingly demanding and experienced, not easily accepting the consumption of products which do not add cultural values and real experiences, or gain of knowledge or change, in their lives.

For Poon (1993) tourism is readjusting, changing from a so-called outdated industrial model, based on a tangible product, to a new tourism focused on symbolic and creative content, centered on tourism experiences. Pappalepore et al. (2010) point out that mass cultural tourism ended by boosting new tourist areas within cities, taking tourists to outlying areas, the suburbs and even rural areas. The migration of cultural tourism to less central areas of the city encourages the contact between tourists and the local community, raising curiosity and new interests whilst providing a cost-effective alternative that meets the needs of the residents of these communities. Richards (2009) reports that tourists are increasingly interested not only in how the handicraft products are made, but are also willing to learn the techniques and the traditions of the people they are visiting. This interaction made possible the first production workshops, and from these experiences comes what we call today 'creative tourism'.

Richards and Russo (2014) note that this new dynamic in the context of the global crisis is being disseminated to the developing economies, increasing direct interaction between visitors and visited offerings, in addition to hosting, the opportunity to experience customs and local traditions.

These transformations have affected not only the dynamics of tourism, but also the offer of products and services; and the way tourists understand and look at the local culture. Richards (2009b) affirms that there was a change in cultural content that is no longer circumscribed to cultural activities such as visiting museums, galleries and monuments. The tourist has assigned a different meaning to culture; and the intangible culture, represented in the spaces that serve local cuisine, markets selling fresh regional produce, direct contact with the population with their knowledge, arts and crafts is increasingly valued.

In addition to the changes in tourists' behavior, who want more than guided tours and passive viewing experiences, Richards and Wilson (2007) point out that the expansion of creative tourism is also due to changes in the behavior of tourism managers, who have begun to look for new ways of interacting with tourists and of constructing the identity of the destination and, thus, stimulate consumption of local culture focusing on the traditions and values of each people and their place. Given these features, Richards (2005) understands creative tourism as a new segment able to change the way tourism has been developed; and in addition to giving a further contribution, it diversifies and innovates the travel experience.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) understand that creative tourism replaces traditional cultural tourism from the construction of experiences. However, the logic of the market tends to reproduce the models of success lowering prices, but in the specific case of creative tourism this is something that should be regarded as high risk, since the experiences depend directly on a culture, of its people and of a specific territory. Tan et al. (2013) point out that the concept of creative tourism was first used in 1993 by Pearce and Butler referring to the potentialities of tourism if it intertwined cultural appreciation and tourists' experiences.

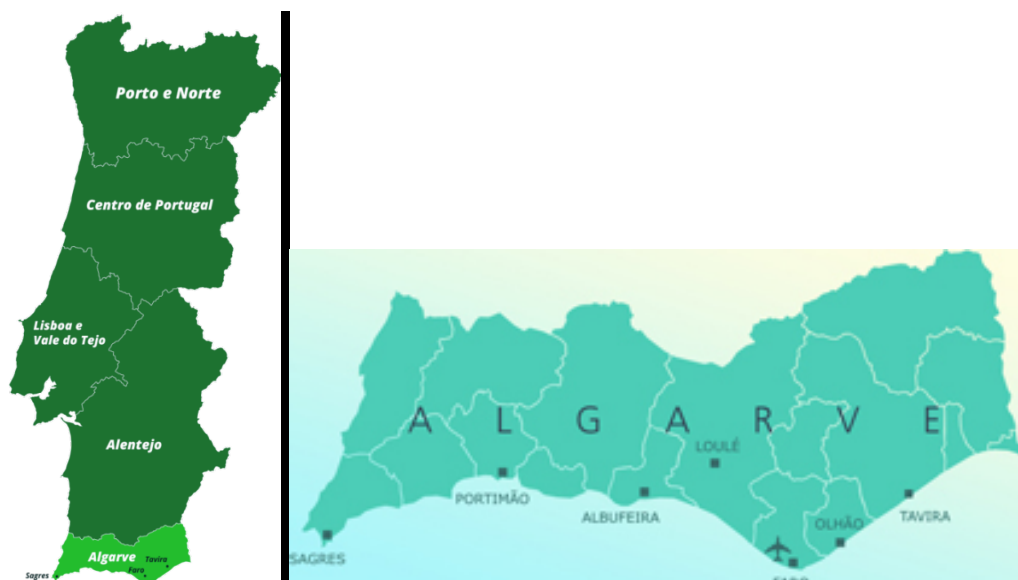
In this work the concept of creative tourism adopted is the one by Richards (2000, p. 18), which presents it as a tourism sector capable of offering "visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in workshops and experiences that are characteristic of the holiday destination where learning is carried out". Overlapping Pine and Gilmore (1999) and Richards' (2009) ideas, the main features of creative tourism are based on: creative potential, active participation, co-creation, activities anchored in the local cultural identity, satisfaction of needs of self-realization and development of a skill. Such ideas corroborate Max-Neef's theory (1992) that development activities can overcome the economic logic, and achieve aspects in social institutions, cultural, educational, health, leisure, among others, and therefore support the satisfaction of human needs. Accordingly Sebastian and Rajagopalan (2009) observe that tourism acts as a tool for transformation and satisfaction of needs, since it changes the conditions of life of the population by encouraging the development of infrastructure and services that are used both by tourists and by the residents. From this perspective, Hall (1992) points out that tourism can foster community participation leading to a strong group identity and generate an appreciation of traditions, knowledge and crafts. Stein & Anderson (1999) point out that tourism provides social cohesion, which promotes the exchange of ideas and sharing of knowledge about their own culture. Therefore, as creative tourism focuses on the pursuit of the authentic and on the connection with local culture, to avoid mass tourism and its standardized products, Lane (1994) and Kastenholtz et al. (2012) observed that the rural areas are the places that most assume this model of tourism. This occurs because rural territories maintain traditions and local values, highly valued and fundamental assets for the development of creative tourism.

Richards (2009) points out that in rural areas there are caves, barns or greenhouses which can be used creatively, avoiding the construction of new buildings for accommodation and restaurants; besides serving their purpose, these facilities arouse visitors' interest. Consequently, the competitive advantages of working with creative tourism in rural areas are numerous. Besides valuing and rescuing local traditions and ancient knowledge, it revives culture enabling a new source of income without a major investment in infra-structure. Therefore, according to Richards (2011) creativity can be the basis for small-scale tourist business in rural areas. Given these factors the "Project Querença" has resorted to creative proposals in their activities in order to enhance local culture, the territory and its surroundings.

"Project Querença"

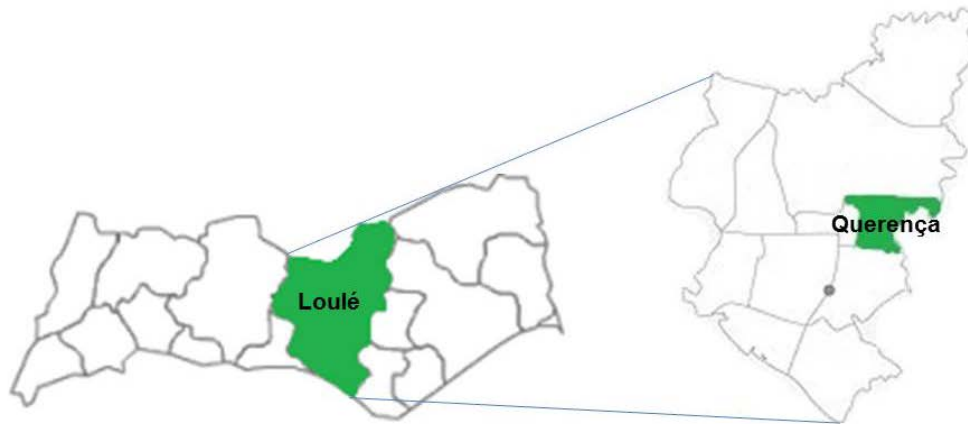
Querença is located in the extreme south of Portugal, in the municipality of Loulé, in the Algarve region of *Barrocal* (fig. 1 and 2) and due to small-scale farming economy, the village suffers depopulation, aggravated by the rural exodus of young people, the aging of the members of the community and a low birth rate, reaching in 2011 a population of 700 inhabitants, of these, 151 people living in isolated (SILVA & SILVA, 2014; INACIO, 2007).

Figure 1: Portugal in the Algarve Featured



Source: Google Images (2016)

Figure 2: Algarve – Municipality of Loulé and Querença



Source: Adapted from Google Images (2016)

One third of the habitants of the Algarve live in 80% of its territory, and the municipality of Loulé has a densely populated coastal area and a de-populated rural interior, in particular areas that have not developed tourism activities (CCDR, 2006). Fernandes (2013) shows the need to develop activities that stimulate the interior of the Algarve in particular the municipality of Loulé, which has strong “Sun and Beach” tourism and, therefore, very favorable economic results. However, with regard to the rural region, the bareness, the little use of natural and cultural heritage as a source of local livelihoods are evident.

To reverse this process, teachers at the University of the Algarve, technicians and residents of the region, have developed a proposal called “Project Querença” (PQ) in order to revive the territory of the village of Querença, currently in a critical situation as a result of the rural exodus and the decline of its social, cultural, economic and natural assets (Covas and Covas, 2013). The initial strategies of the project (2010) were based on: food innovation, sustainable landscapes and gardening, tourist activities focusing on ecotourism, rural tourism and educational activities. The current stage started in 2014, actions have been taken as: the development of an energy bar with typical fruits of the region, stimulating organic farming, but the majority of the

interventions in the village have been made within the scope of creative tourism (associated with tourism of nature with hiking and contemplation of nature, handicraft workshops, food, and other products of the local culture).

According to Kastenholz et al. (2011) tourism can be a starting point for reducing the distance between locals and tourists, thus developing new products and new ways of acting in the territory. Since the beginning of the “Project Querença”, innumerable interventions have been carried out in the territory, however, in this process two key activities can be highlighted: the creation of the ‘Market of Querença’ and the formation of a network of partners to value local culture, emphasizing different activities and events showing that the Algarve has much to offer in the areas of the interior where tourism is less developed. The market of Querença is not a novelty in the village, authors such as Alves and Fernandes (2013), Fernandes (2013) and Casaca (2012) indicate that the region had had a street market, but, due to the aging population and an active portion of the population working in Loulé or in subsistence activities in Querença and nearby villages, the market was gradually being abandoned and went extinct thirty years ago. With the “Project Querença” the market occurs monthly, always on the last Sunday of the month, where the community exposes and sells its products to visitors invited via social networks and emails to friends and acquaintances. In addition to the sale of products, every edition of the market has a theme that guides the parallel activities that are part of the programming. These activities differ according to various things: the produce on sale, the season of the year or a particular interest of the team, or of the visitors, and can be lectures, workshops, walks and leisure activities for children and adults. All these have made the market of Querença the activity that generates more visibility to the project and to the region. Importantly, this dynamic and all the visibility that the market brings to Querença demonstrate that actions like these with creative tourism features not only encourage active participation in anchored activities in the local culture but also meet the needs of self-realization and development of the population and visitors as stated Pine and Gilmore (1999) and Richards (2009).

The elements of Querença (nature, cultural and social) used creatively as suggested by Richards (2011, 2009) offer to residents and visitors activities associated with knowledge already forgotten and pushed aside. Resuming this knowledge is also important in the recovery of local development from Max-Neef’s perspective (2012;

1992), i.e. meeting human needs related to economic gain is associated with satisfaction, pleasure, increased self-esteem of everyone involved.

Concerning the network that has been formed around the “Project Querença”, three features or actions stand out: Project TASA, Loulé Creative Tourism and Ameixial's Walking Festival:

Project TASA (Ancient Traditions, Current Solutions) is a proposal whose professionals work focused on the innovation of handicraft products in terms of value, (re)identification and (re)interpretation and rehabilitation of the cultural and commercial status of the works and craft products. In addition to promoting the interaction of artisans and designers, it encourages the creation and reinterpretation of local craft works, bringing its members closer to the distribution channels, boosting sales and promoting the partnership with ‘Loulé Creative’ through courses and workshops that disseminate, sensitize and enhance local traditions for locals and visitors.

Loulé Creative Tourism is a program that offers the new generation of tourists experiences of active participation in culture, traditions and way of life of the residents of Loulé. Its activities are diverse such as workshops, short-term courses, themed weekends and other activities under the theme art, crafts, food and music. Loulé stands out for the quality of its tourist offer, for its cultural, historical and natural heritage, maintaining a wide variety of traditions, habits and customs until today. Creative tourism gives visitors the opportunity to live together with the community and to develop a rich knowledge through the valuation of the identity of the territory, training, innovation and the activity of artisans and professionals of the creative industries.

Ameixial's Walking Festival is an annual event which is in its third edition and takes place in the north of the Algarve, near Alentejo in the Caldeirão Mountain. The festival aims to raise awareness for the valuation and protection of the cultural and natural heritage of the region. The activities are hiking and mountain racing, technical workshops, nature interpretive trails, culture, heritage and archaeology, food tasting, crafts and social interaction with seniors who have expertise related to activities of the event.

This activity format has a potential to raise awareness for the valuation and protection of the cultural and natural heritage of the region as suggested by Stein and Anderson (1999) and Hall (1992), resulting in cohesion, unity and sense of cultural belonging, important elements if you want to decrease the rural exodus and consequent

population desertification. It adds to this set of activities some others from the “Project Querença”, involving Querença and other surrounding villages thus creating a repertoire of options for leisure, entertainment and tourism and attracting visits from the Algarve and external visitors from other regions of Portugal, members of the European Community and other non-European countries. Although there are no official figures of the first event, the organizers point out that it has experienced visible growth year after year. The last edition saw the involvement of 12 partners; with an audience of 350 participants from four different nationalities; and an economic impact estimated at € 2,600.

The purpose of the project is to reverse the negative conditions related to the exodus of young people, depopulation and lack of human, social and economic capital. The hope is to recuperate villages and towns and to bring growth prospects not only in terms of population, but also reviving traditions and cultural values that have always been part of the millennial history of the people who have built their life story in the region.

Final considerations

Creative tourism has become an increasingly common strategy for the development of a new tourism model, focused on experience and knowledge, based on the valuation of natural and cultural aspects of a territory, ruled by the paradigm shift in tourist consumption behavior. The activities developed by the “Project Querença” and its network of partners combines the rurality, present not only in the landscape, but also in the activities of the population such as the subsistence agriculture, with the singularities linked to habits, traditions, historical and cultural elements of the village, as a way of attracting tourists and ensure authenticity the new range of products and services offered. The managers of these initiatives, as well as the partners believe that such experiences have positive implications, because creativity gives not only the village but the whole region an innovative character that drives the creation of new products. The destination and all others who are close are strengthened with the actions of “Project Querença” and with the knowledge sharing between them.

These aforementioned aspects can be highlighted through the activities of Creative Loulé, namely the workshops of wicker weaving, pottery wheels, whitewash paints, dried fruit-based confectionary, screen printing, among others. These activities

bring together the knowledge of artisan members of TASA and “Project Querença” as well as local visitors and/or tourists in transit through the Algarve. In addition to generating economic benefits for the local community, this provides protection and valuation of the patrimony of the place. By adopting an alternative format based on creativity, the “Project Querença” changes the existing dynamics via direct action on social, environmental, cultural and economic dimensions, in order to promote local and sustainable human development capable to hinder depopulation and promote alternative sources of income and sociability.

More than an action focused on a new tourist offer, it is observed that there is a revival of community’s social dynamics. The Market, in particular, and the activities developed around it, enable and stimulate interaction between community members and tourists, creating a space for socialization and socio-cultural exchanges, arguments cited by the authors surveyed during the investigation.

The initial high expectations of the population due to the massive media coverage that “Project Querença” has received in its first stage are now redirected to a dimension closer to the reality in which the concrete actions that can generate real development for the community will be achieved in the long term. At last, it is understood that increased networking is key to the development of Creative Tourism, involving the local community as a mediator throughout the process of implementation, whilst representative of the cultural identity for experiences of co-creation between artisans and visitors/tourists.

Finally, it is important to see creativity as a privileged resource able to boost and stimulate the growth and local development associated with different clusters where there is an entrepreneurial vocation of the population. It is understood that there is no ideal format for its unfolding, requiring further research to identify the best practices that should be adopted, as well as the critical points to be tackled in the territories in which it is intended to plan actions as described in this paper.

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